

from reliable authority, my informant knowing the bird well, that in a great thicket near Cape Naturaliste there are several gnaw's nests and that they breed there.

BUSTARD (*Eupodotis australis*):

Is now scarce in this district. Every particular as to its habits may be obtained from parties living at Mandurah, Rockingham or the Serpentine, for in that part of the country the bustard or wild turkey used to, and I believe still does, abound.

## THE ORNITHOLOGICAL COLLECTING OF DR. L. PREISS IN 1839

By L. GLAUERT, W.A. Museum, Perth.

Dr. Johann August Ludwig Preiss was a German naturalist who collected in the Swan River Colony in the early years of its establishment. He commenced his activities in the Fremantle area in December, 1838, and left the colony direct for London on January 8, 1842. Thus his work was contemporary with that of John Gilbert, the able collector for the celebrated Gould.

Preiss was an assiduous collector whose collections of botanical and zoological specimens numbered several hundred thousands and yet today little is known concerning the whereabouts or composition of most of this material. When therefore, the State Archivist, Miss M. Lukis, drew my attention to a letter she had found among the State papers, a letter to which was appended a list of the birds collected by him up to October 11, 1838, I realised its importance and thanked Miss Lukis for bringing it under my notice.

The letter is an offer of the entire collection to the government for £3,000, £2,000 to be "in ready money" and the balance in the form of a grant of land at the minimum price of 5/- per acre. Apparently nothing resulted from the offer, though no other documents bearing on it are available. Had the transaction gone through the collection would have been forwarded to the British Museum and would not have been retained in the colony.

After listing the species in the collection Preiss added: "These birds are well skinned and stuffed. On each etiquette is the number, the name with synonyms, the colour of the iris and lens crystallina, locus natalis, date, year, colonial and native name, genus, whether male or female, old or young and of different ages, the colour of some parts of the birds as the bill, crista, carunculae, feet, etc.—their food, the voice partly imitated by music notes, rare or not, nest and eggs, but not of every bird—and preserved the tongue. I have now about 600 specimens containing 162 species."

The information provided about each specimen is extraordinarily detailed even by present-day standards, and I venture to sug-

gest that no museum in Australia has such a large collection so fully labelled or described.

The collections were mostly made on the coastal plain near Perth and the Darling Range, such localities as "Green Mountain," Middle Swan and "the Cataract" being mentioned. However, he must have gone further afield as G. Fletcher Moore recorded in his diary under March 8, 1839, that Preiss had discovered a fossil encrinite in the Toodyay district. This must have been obtained from the Gingin chalk at Gingin, the nearest locality where such fossils are known to occur. Further material from the Toodyay district was probably included in the collection of bird skins sold to Preiss by Drummond's youngest son, Johnston, as reported in James Drummond's letter to W. J. Hooker dated May 28, 1839. A few of Preiss's birds were still on exhibition in the Zoological Museum, Hamburg, when Dr. D. L. Serventy visited that institution in 1937. His notes on the specimens were published by Major H. M. Whittell in *The Emu*, vol. 41, 1941, p. 116. It has since been learned that these specimens were lost when the museum was totally destroyed by bombing in the late war. So it appears that Dr. Serventy is the only living Australian ornithologist ever to have viewed them.

The list of bird specimens attached to Preiss's letter is too lengthy to reproduce here. It is a comprehensive collection of the known bird fauna of the South-west and includes some species which deserve special mention. Among the rarities which Preiss managed to procure were the Blue Petrel (*Halobaena caerulea*), which is one of the rarest petrels occurring in local seas; the Scarlet-chested Parrot (*Neophema splendida*) which no ornithologist has reported from the State for over a century; and the Emu-wren (*Stipiturus malacurus*), now very scarce and local on the Swan coastal plain. There are several birds which obviously came from the Toodyay area or towards the Moore River—where evidently the Scarlet-chested Parrot already mentioned had come from, as specimens were sent to Gould from here by Johnston Drummond in 1845. These would include the Major Mitchell Cockatoo (*Kakatoe leadbeateri*), the Smoker (*Polytelis melanura*), Elegant Parrot (*Neophema elegans*), Gilbert Whistler (*Pachycephala inornata*), Crested Bell-bird (*Oreoica gutturalis*), Chestnut Quail-thrush (*Cinelosoma castanotum*), Blue-breasted Wren (*Malurus pulcherrimus*) and the Zebra Finch (*Poephila castanotis*).

Preiss mentioned that there were 38 species in the collection which were not named, which is not surprising as Gould subsequently named a number of new species from the material Gilbert sent to him. Among these were such interesting forms as the Bristle-bird (*Dasyornis brachypterus*) and the famed Noisy Scrub-bird (*Atrichornis clamosus*). Whether any of these figured among the 38 unnamed birds in Preiss's collection one can only speculate.